



QUEENS BOROUGH PUBLIC LIBRARY



Using TANDBERG videoconferencing equipment, Queens Library brings famous authors to the reading public for free.

CHALLENGE

As the largest circulating public library in the United States, Queens Borough Public Library (Queens Library) serves a customer base of 2.2 million residents across its 64 libraries. In 1999, Queens Library purchased its first videoconferencing system for use in supporting staff development. In addition to being vastly underutilized, the technology Queens Library had implemented was unreliable. As Assistant Director of Program Coordination and Management for Queens Library, Kathy Degyansky recalls, "I had so much trouble with the equipment, especially with the cameras freezing up and I couldn't use the equipment for IP (Internet Protocol). I also had a lot of service issues and had to call for support all the time."

In 2004, Queens Library discovered that its supplier also offered TANDBERG equipment and invested in a 770 MXP system — a portable, high-performance set-top unit, adding another the following year.

"I haven't had to call for service since then," remarks Degyansky. "I have had zero problems with TANDBERG — absolutely zero. I wouldn't buy any other type of equipment. It's the Cadillac of videoconferencing systems."

SOLUTION

Recognizing that videoconferencing offered opportunities far beyond staff development, Queens Library began using the technology to purchase content similar to the way many schools do, exposing Queens residents to programs from sources as diverse as the Center for Puppetry Arts in Atlanta, Georgia; Mote Marine Laboratory in Sarasota, Florida; the Ohio-based Center of Science and Industry; the New York Hall of Science; and a variety of zoos and museums. But the application Degyansky finds most exciting is author visits.

"Having a live author come to town would be very expensive," says Degyansky. "It's something we would not have the funds to do. With videoconferencing, any library — even those in rural areas — can take advantage of this incredible opportunity."



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Degyansky goes on to provide examples of how Queens Library has capitalized on video technology: “There is a very popular children’s author in Pasadena, California — Eve Bunting — who presented to kids in my library by walking to her local library. She read from her book and took questions, and then she walked home. And she did it for free. It’s attractive to authors because they only take a small break from their writing. In fact, I have never, ever had an author say no.”

Another author who participated in a free videoconference visit was Gary Soto, “a young adult author who lives in California and will not travel east of the Mississippi,” says Degyansky. “A lot of kids in this city have read him — he is required reading in the schools. We did a multi-point videoconference with two audiences, each made up of four to five classes. Everyone in the audience had read his book and they asked cogent questions based on his actual work. The students had even illustrated his book and showed him during the video visit. That is very gratifying for authors — it’s not like going to a bookstore and answering generic questions about writing. They like the interaction with people who know the characters in their books.”

“Without videoconferencing,” continues Degyansky, “we couldn’t afford to do these author programs. A typical speaker’s fee is \$5,000, plus there are travel and hotel costs. More importantly, most authors probably wouldn’t do it — they would not devote two days of their writing lives to come out here and talk to a book group.”

“Authors live everywhere, and a lot of them are in rural areas,” explains Degyansky. “With videoconferencing, we can entice them by saying ‘You don’t have to get on a plane, you don’t have to do anything — just walk away from your desk for 30 minutes.’”

RESULTS

For Degyansky, who is “not a technical person, it’s so easy to use this technology — especially the TANDBERG equipment,” she says. “I take it in a gadget case and I can set it up in any library in Queens; I hook it up to a television monitor or projector, and I’m done. It’s also very, very affordable.”

“I used to have stand-alone equipment in certain libraries, but that limited the places I could do these programs,” notes Degyansky. “TANDBERG was the first equipment I found viable for IP mobility. It’s so reliable too. I had so much trouble with the other ‘X’ brands. I had 12 units from another vendor and I had service issues with all of them. In the 3 years since I switched to TANDBERG, I’ve never had to call for service.”

In addition to the TANDBERG equipment’s mobility, ease of use, and reliability, Degyansky mentions quality of service as one of its major advantages. And regarding videoconferencing in general, she reiterates her interest in author programs: “It’s a big deal to have an author come to the library. For book groups, meeting an author is like meeting a movie star. And for librarians, authors are our idols.”

With a conservative cost estimate of \$5,000 per author visit, Queens Library is saving tens of thousands of dollars each year.

But, says Degyansky, “It’s not really about the savings; yes, the return on investment is unbelievable, but it’s really a question of access. I would not have this access to authors without videoconferencing because I could not spend City money on these programs. A normal library would have zero, or maybe one, author visit per year. Videoconferencing is providing an opportunity I would not otherwise have.”

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